

# Art Seen: The Magic of Richard Benjamin



## Local photographer captures the beauty of Rhode Island

I was wading in the water along the shores not very far from Scarborough Beach out near Narragansett, shooting pictures and wandering with my dog Ali. It was a hot summer day and I was a young upstart shooter just as the big surge of photography was in its early stages of being. The year was 1969. As I made my way along the shore with the sun beating down on my uncovered back, I began to watch another photographer basically doing what I was doing - working the shoreline for subjects. In his hands was a camera not unlike my own, but attached to the front was a huge optical monster that was a first for my eyes. I walked closer and when my curiosity reached its peak I called out, "Hey! What the hell is that thing on your camera?"

The "thing" was a 500 mm mirrored lens, indeed a monster in its day, and the shooter was photographer Richard Benjamin, who went on to become one of the premier photographers of Rhode Island in modern times. What commenced was a short, friendly and mutually enjoyable conversation that started a friendship that has lasted 45 years. I am proud to know Richard Benjamin. His skill, knowledge and accomplishments in the world of photography pretty much made him The Rhode Island Photographer. With many books to his credit and his work available in almost every printable form, he is prolific and terrific at what he does.

Sure, you can always talk about Arin Siskind or Harry Callahan (RISD cats) as being the prima donnas of local photo lore, but I am confident more local folks know the name Richard Benjamin, and for good reason. With a full career at the *Pro-Jo*; multiple book credits; and numerous sales from some of the best galleries, representatives or organizations, my money is on Benjamin. I admit there may be some prejudice involved based upon the longstanding friendship and interwoven events in our lives.



Both Dick and I had our humble photo

beginnings in the military. Much of our work has been people-oriented and seasoned with journalism. We've exhibited together and even sat on panels to debate topics or help out with big pro-bono activities like Flames of Hope. But that's not at the root of my admiration. In addition to the long-held success of his marriage, and his success as a father and granddad, he's always had both feet on the ground. Though Dick was one of the first to change horses and leave wet-lab photography for the digital tidal wave, he remains a nuts and bolts kind of guy without even a drop of pretense, arrogance or insincerity. Our agreements and disagreements about photography have been based on real issues and real observations, not even a tad of elitist intellectualism. He rises every day; hunts the ideal location, light and the time of day; and does it with such a work ethic he could have been the model used for all photographers. I believe that Richard Benjamin has a complete and detailed map of every inch of Rhode Island, including any alteration made during the past five decades. That's not a joke.

I have at least 10 stories of how Dick has flagged me down on the road only to whip out his latest gadget camera that he's having a honeymoon with. "Look at my latest," he'll say. He recently stopped by to give me my annual Benjamin calendar of Rhode Island and then proceeded to shoot a wonderful little family rendition of my wife, my son and me before scooting out the door just as quickly as he had appeared, in the fine style of Peter Pan.

Suffice is to say, that if you are not familiar with the name and the work of Richard Benjamin, you must be a new arrival or have been hiding under a doormat somewhere. If you possess a love of scenic photography, catch his work at Picture This on Wickenden Street in Providence or purchase one of his many books on our wonderful little city state.

Richard Benjamin is Rhode Island's premier shooter on the subject of Lil Rhody and never stops working at his craft. In many ways he is the magic of his own toil - he is the art form and the

photographs are merely a sampling of the man himself. For a happy new year, please treat yourself to a Benjamin calendar and gaze upon it all year long. You may just want to return for an authentic Benjamin print; it's well worth the trip.